



# **Atmosphere and Severe Weather**

## **Chapter 9**

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# Learning Objectives

- Understand Earth's energy balance and energy exchanges that produce climate and weather
  - Know the different types of severe weather events
  - Know the main effects of severe weather events, as well as their linkages to other natural hazards
  - Recognize some natural service functions of severe weather
  - Understand how human beings interact with severe hazards and how we can minimize the effects of these hazards
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# Energy

- Understanding Energy is fundamental to understanding severe weather
  - When we experience severe weather, we need to remember there is a large amount of energy being expended
  - There are three types of Energy
    - Potential – stored energy
    - Kinetic – energy of motion
    - Heat – energy of random motions of atoms and molecules
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# Heat

- **Heat energy** – the **kinetic** energy of atoms or molecules within a substance
  - **Heat energy** – **energy** that transfers from one object to another because of the difference in **temperature**
    - The two types of **heat** that are important to atmospheric processes are **sensible heat** and **latent heat**
  - **Sensible heat** – heat that may be sensed or monitored by a thermometer
  - **Latent heat** – heat that is either absorbed or released when a substance changes from liquid to a solid or a solid to a liquid
    - **Evaporation**- when water changes to water vapor, energy is released, cooling happens
    - **Condensation**- water vapor turns to water, energy is stored, heating happens
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# Heat Transfer

- **Conduction**

➤ **Conduction relies on temperature differences**, causing heat to flow through a substance from an area of greater temperature to one of lower temperature. The atmosphere is a bad conductor of heat, where the earth and water are good conductors of heat

- **Convection**

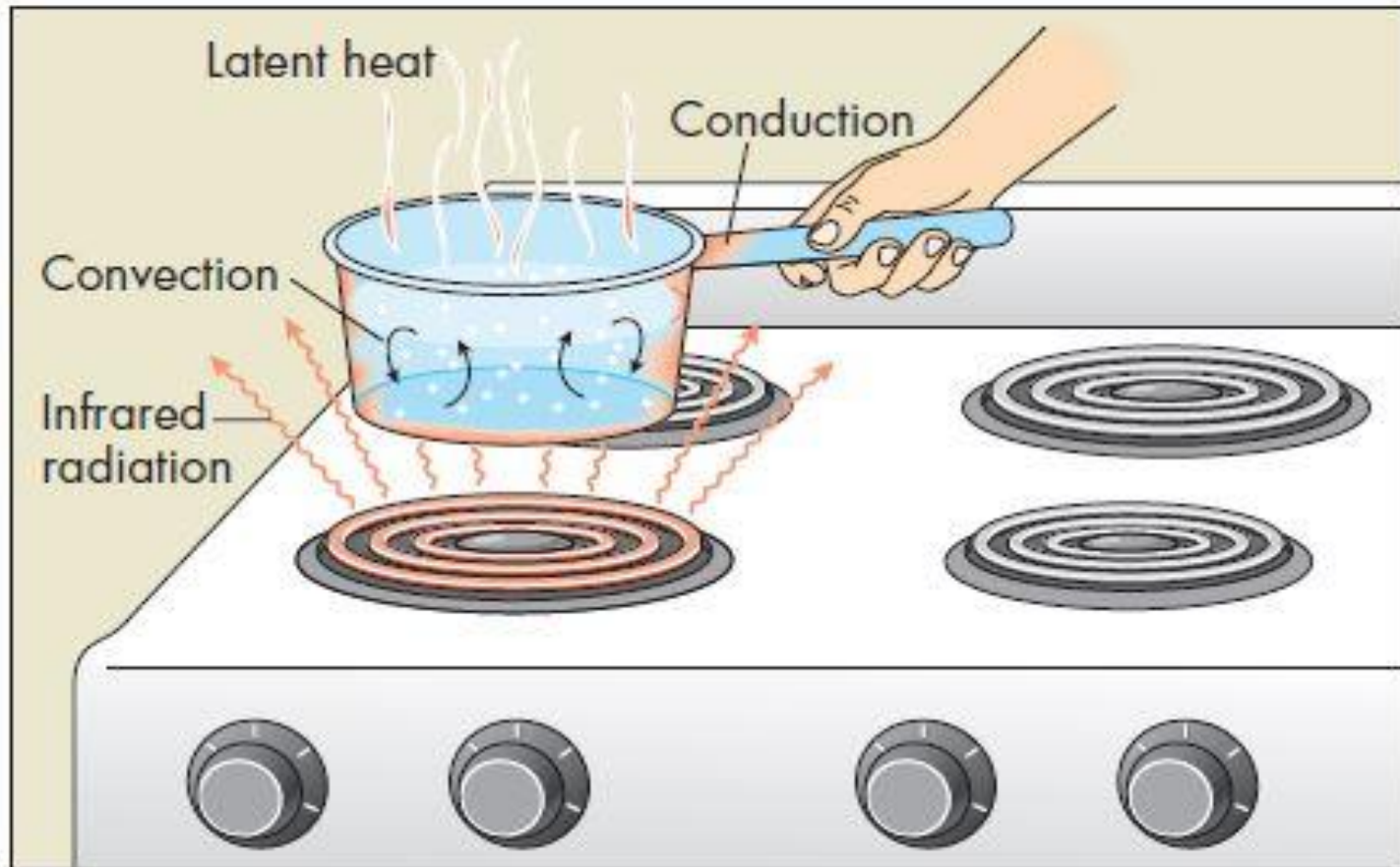
➤ **Convection is the transfer of heat** by the mass movement of a fluid, such as water or air. Physical mixing of heat energy in the atmosphere or water is called a convection cell.

- **Radiation**

➤ **Radiation is a wavelike energy** that is emitted by any substance that possesses heat. The transfer of energy by radiation occurs by oscillations in an electric field and a magnetic field are called electromagnetic waves.

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# Heat Transfer

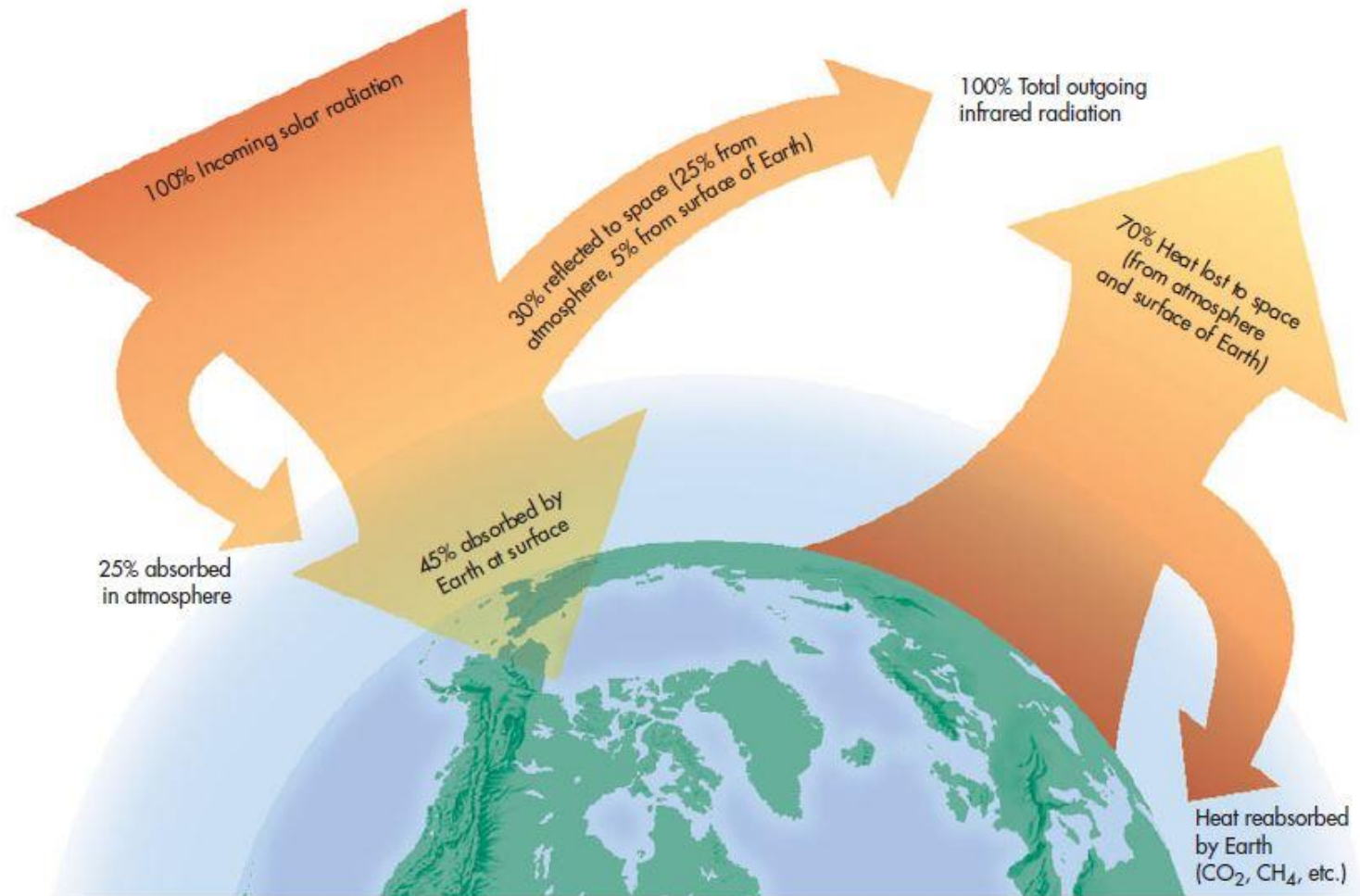




# Earth's Energy Balance

- The Earth receives Solar Energy everyday
    - This energy sustains the Earth
    - All the solar energy received by the Earth is radiated back into space
    - In the shift from incoming to out going energy some of the energy changes form, but it is neither created nor destroyed.
  - This **Solar Energy** drives the
    - Hydrologic Cycle
    - Ocean Waves and Currents
    - Global Atmospheric Circulation
  - Although the Earth's energy balance contains several important components, nearly all of the energy available at the Earth's surface comes from the sun.
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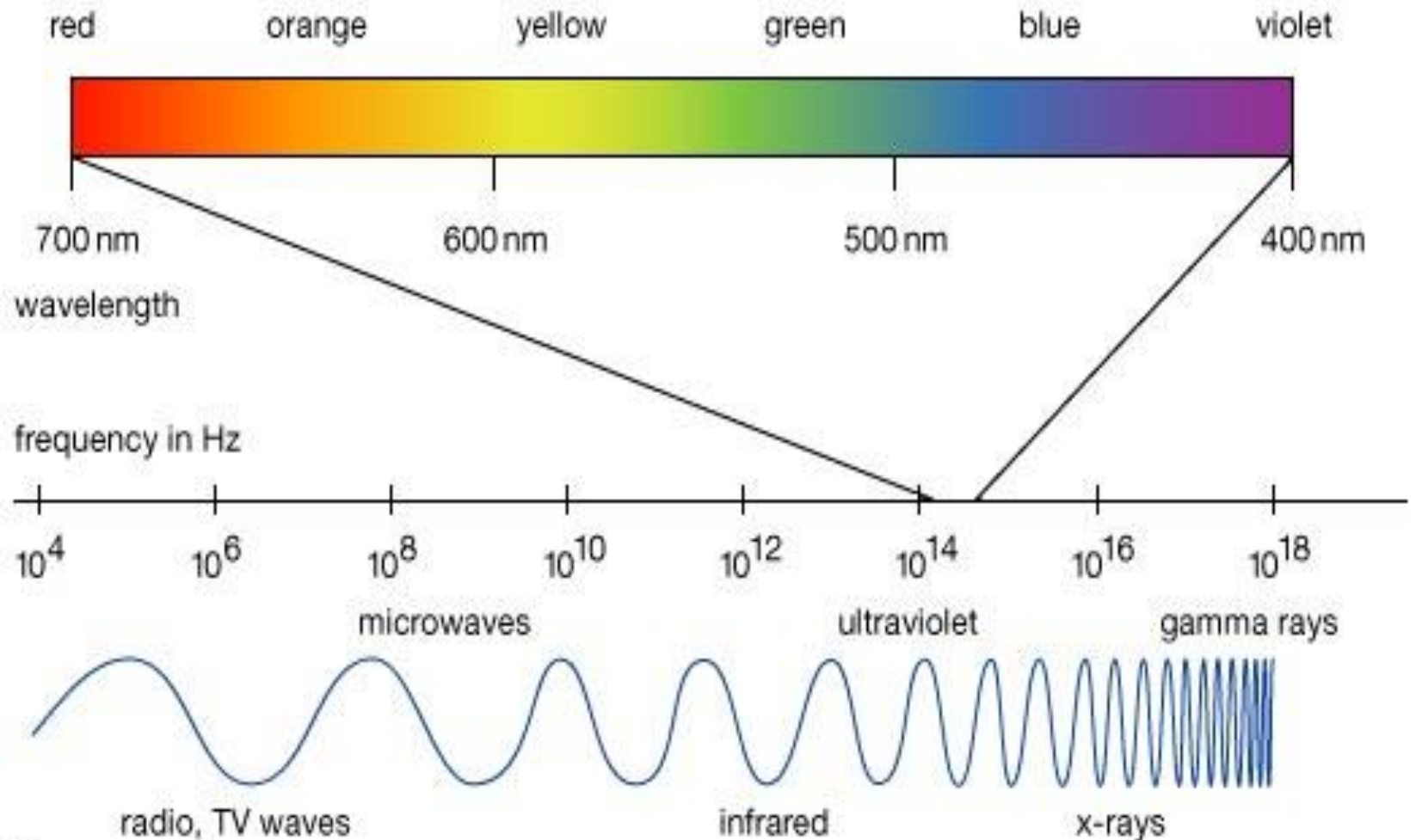
# Earth's Energy Balance





# Electromagnetic Energy

- Much of the energy emitted from the sun is electromagnetic energy
    - This **energy** is a type of **radiation** which travels from the sun to the **earth at the speed of light**
    - This energy is described as a **wave**
    - Distance between the tops of **two successive waves** is called the **wavelength**
    - The various **types of electromagnetic radiation** are **distinguished by their wavelengths**
    - The is called the electromagnetic spectrum
      - ❖ The longer wavelengths include radio waves and microwaves
      - ❖ The shorter wavelengths include X-rays and gamma rays
      - ❖ Visible wavelengths are a small fraction of the spectrum
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# Energy Behavior

- Once the Solar Energy reaches the Earth it is redirected, transmitted, or absorbed by the atmosphere, ocean, and land.
    - 100 units of Solar Radiation hits the atmosphere.
      - ❖ Some is absorbed
      - ❖ Some is reflected
      - ❖ Some is radiated
    - Total units radiated out are 100 units
  - Albedo
    - The reflective value of an object
      - ❖ The higher the Albedo value the more radiation the object reflects.
  - The atmosphere is heated by Earth radiation rather than the sun radiation.
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# Basic Heating & Cooling Processes in the Atmosphere

- Radiation or Emission

- The process by which *electromagnetic energy is emitted from an object*

- ❖ The hotter the object the more radiation it emits

- Absorption

- The process of *electromagnetic waves by striking an object*

- ❖ Different objects have different absorption abilities

- Reflection

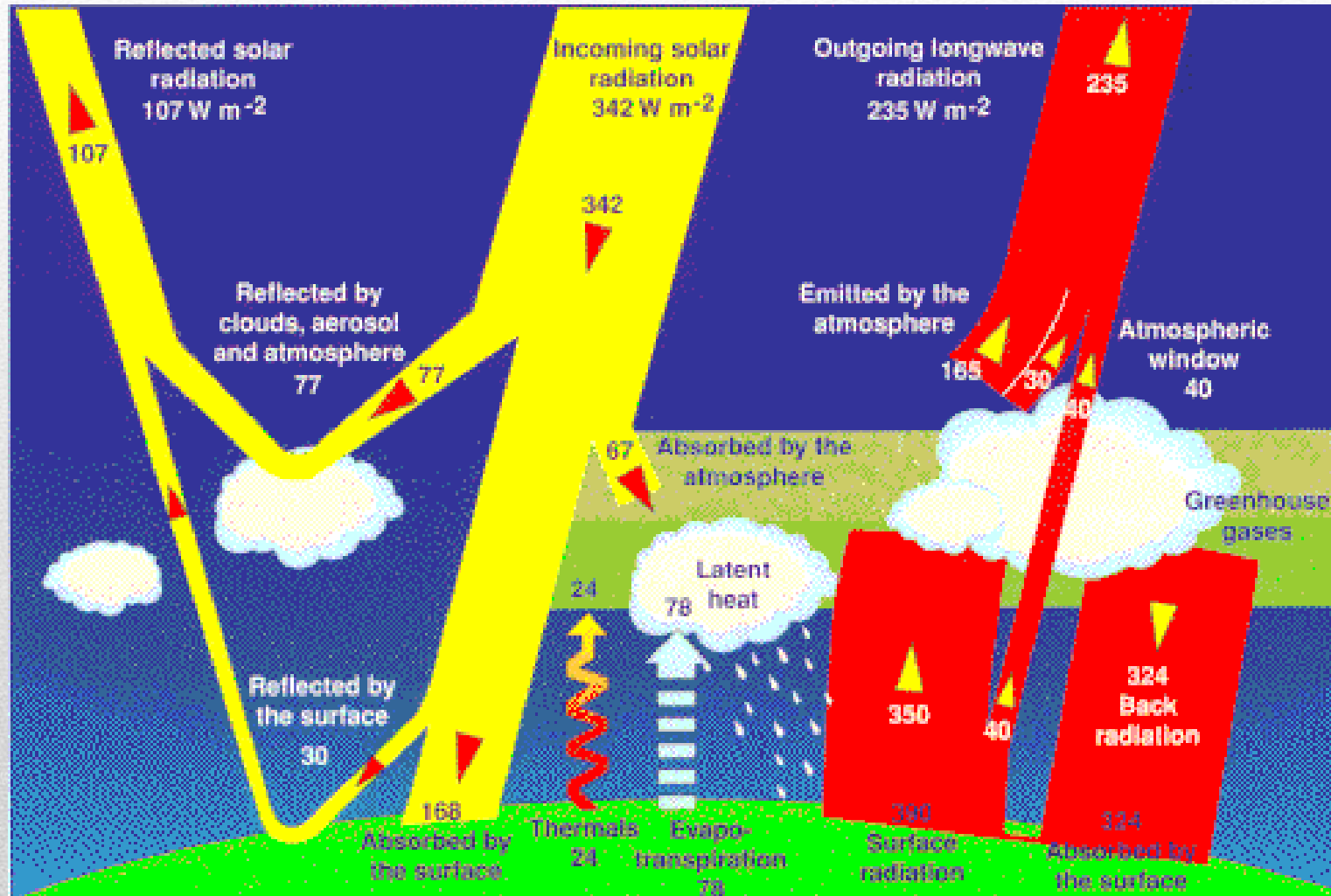
- The ability of an object to repel electromagnetic waves without altering either the object or the waves

- The relative amount of energy reflected or absorbed is important in determining the temperature of the air and land

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# Earth's Energy Balance

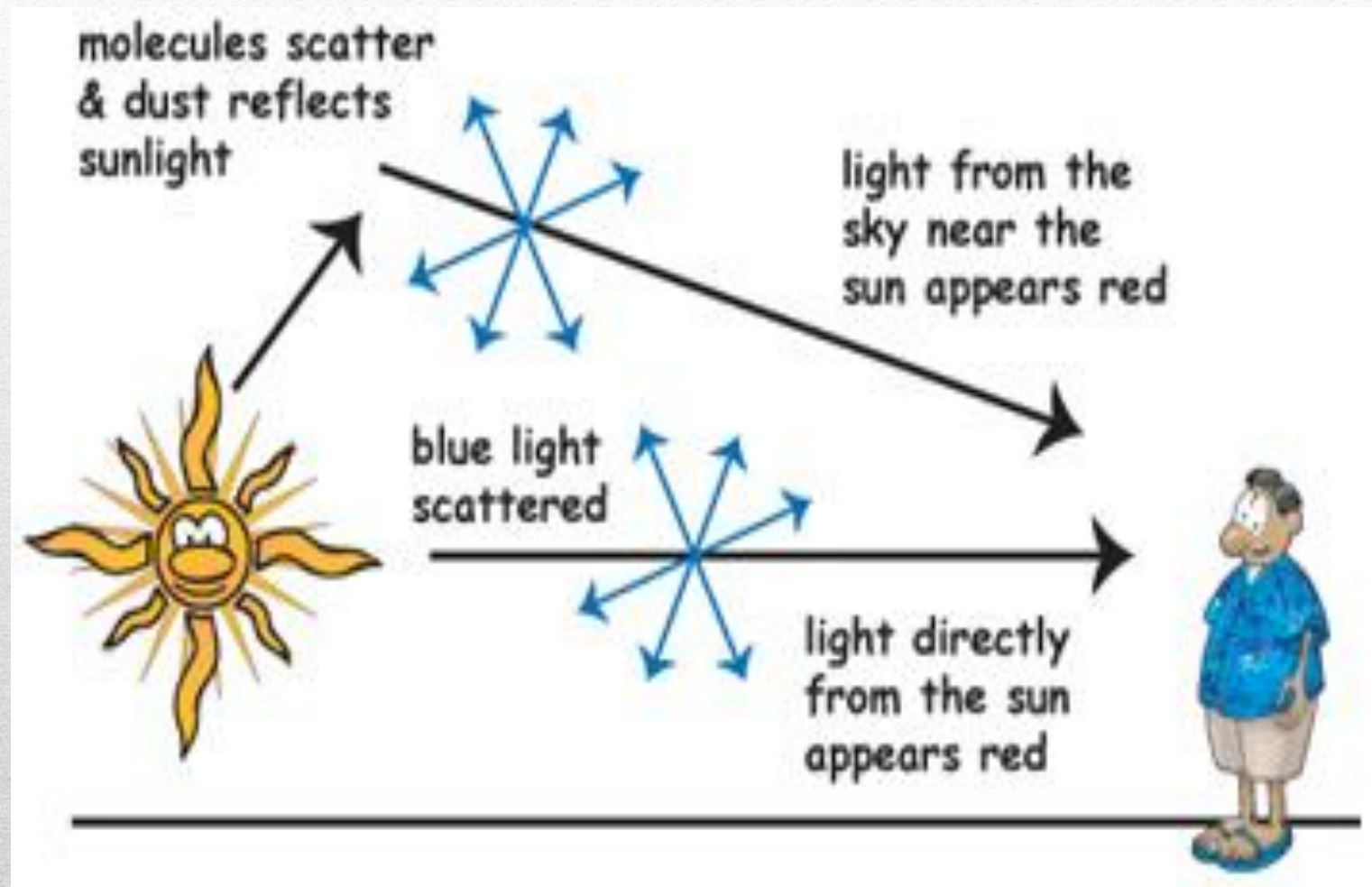


# Basic Heating and Cooling Processes in the Atmosphere

- **Scattering**

- The act of deflecting or redirecting light waves with gas molecules and particulate matter in the air.
  - Rayleigh Scattering – when the shortest wavelengths are scattered (violet and blue)– causes the “blue sky”
  - Sunset or Sunrise– all the blue waves scattered as the energy passes through a longer atmosphere (larger angle) red, orange, and yellow left
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# The Atmosphere

- **Gaseous envelope that surrounds the earth**
    - Made up of gas molecules, suspended particles of solid and liquid, and falling precipitation
    - Causes all the weather we experience
    - Responsible for trapping the heat that warms the Earth enough to be habitable
    - Knowledge of the structure and dynamics of the atmosphere is critical to understanding severe weather, as well as the mechanism and causes of global warming
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# Composition of the Atmosphere

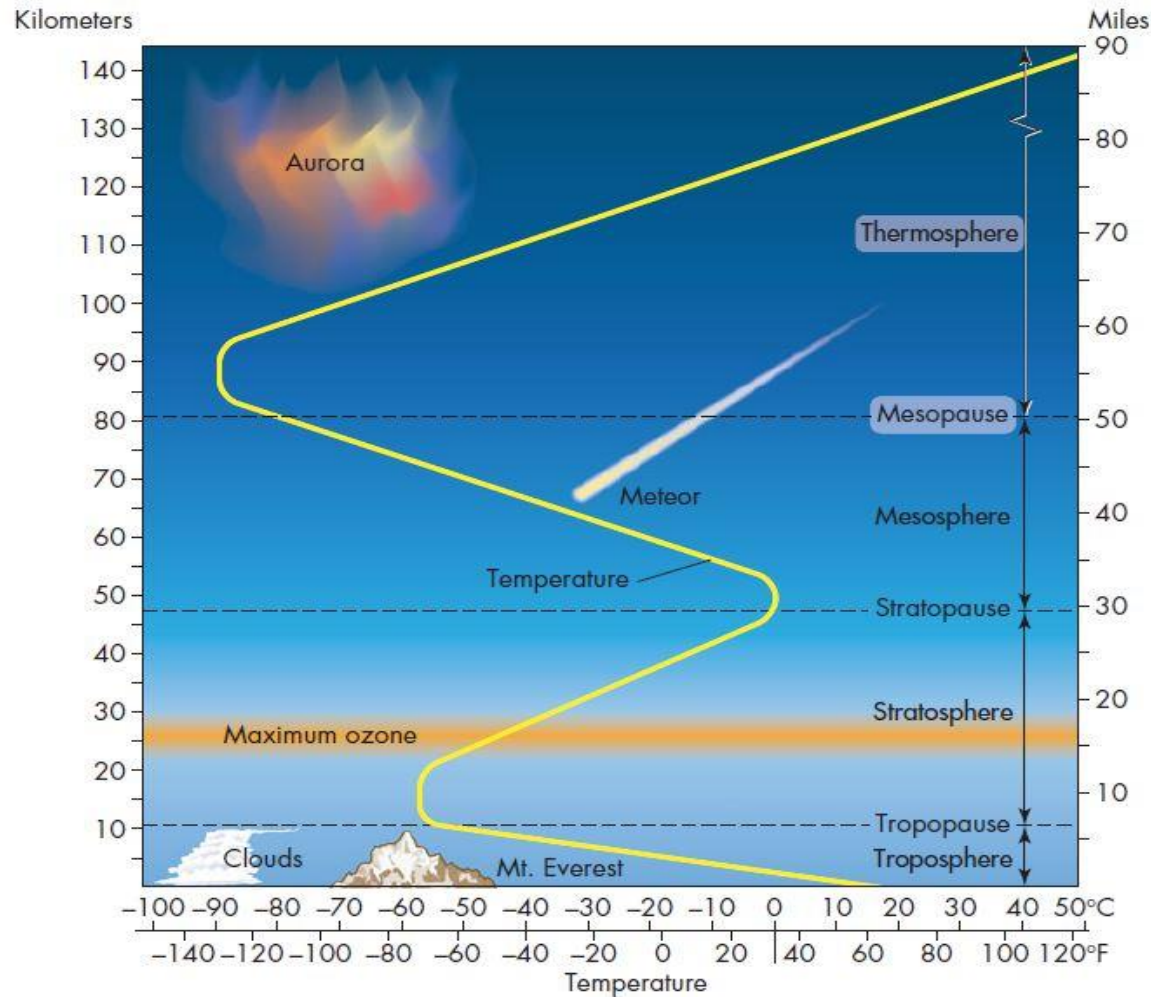
- The main two gases found in the atmosphere are nitrogen and oxygen
  - Carbon dioxide is next gas found in a small amount in the atmosphere
  - Relative humidity is one of the types of moisture found in the atmosphere
    - This is the **most familiar** of moisture measurements
    - This ratio compares the actual amount of water vapor in the air to the water vapor capacity of the air at a given temperature
      - ❖ Capacity is the maximum amount of water vapor that can be in the air at a given time
      - ❖ As the temperature increases, relative humidity decreases
      - ❖ As the temperature decreases, relative humidity increases
-

# Structure of the Atmosphere

- Thermal layers of the atmosphere
    - Troposphere and Tropopause -- **COLD**
      - ❖ Lowest level, closest to sea level
      - ❖ 11 miles at equator to 8 miles at poles
      - ❖ Varies with the passages of warm and cold air
    - Stratosphere and Stratopause--**WARM**
      - ❖ Extends from 11 miles above sea level to 30 miles above sea level
      - ❖ Has the Ozone layer within, causes the warming by stopping Ozone
    - Mesosphere and Mesopause--**COLD**
      - ❖ Begins 30 miles and ends 50 miles above sea level
    - Thermosphere--**WARM**
      - ❖ Begins at 50 miles and gradually extends out
    - Exosphere—**NO TEMPERATURE**
      - ❖ Outer most portion of the atmosphere
      - ❖ Blends with interplanetary space
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# Structure of the Atmosphere



# Weather Process

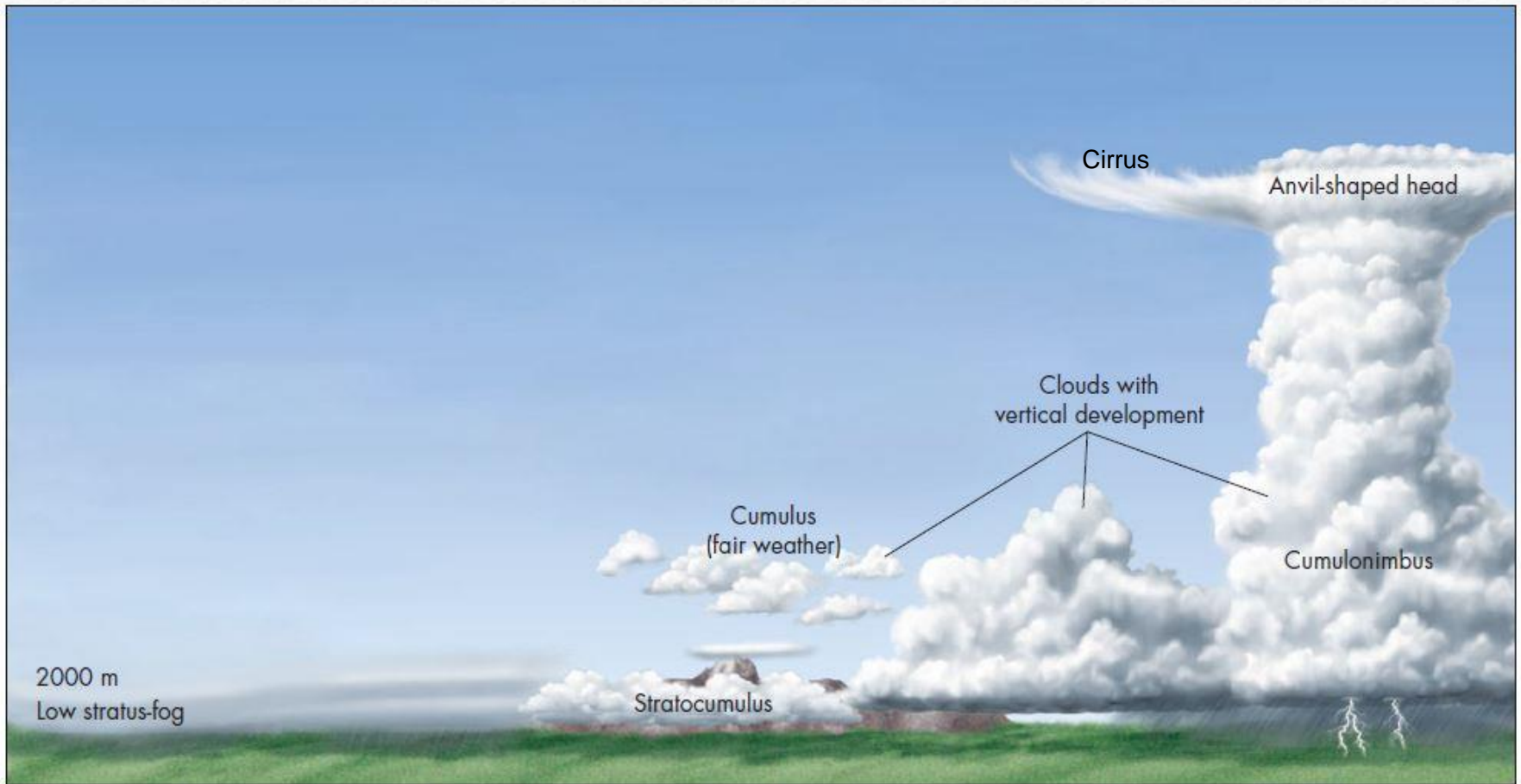
- Four aspects of the atmosphere directly related to severe weather are:
    - Atmospheric pressure and circulation patterns
    - Vertical stability of the atmosphere
    - The Coriolis effect
    - The interaction of different air masses
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# Clouds

- **Clouds associated with severe weather**
  - Consist of small water droplets
  - Classified on the basis of altitude (low, middle, and high) and form
    - Cirriform – high thin and wispy and composed of ice crystals – often proceeds a storm
    - Stratiform – appear as a grayish sheets that cover most or all of the sky, rarely being broken up into individual cloud units – can be associated with the formation of fog
    - Cumuliform – massive and rounded, usually with a flat base and limited horizontal extent but often billowing upward to great heights – associated with severe thunderstorms and tornadoes
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# Clouds



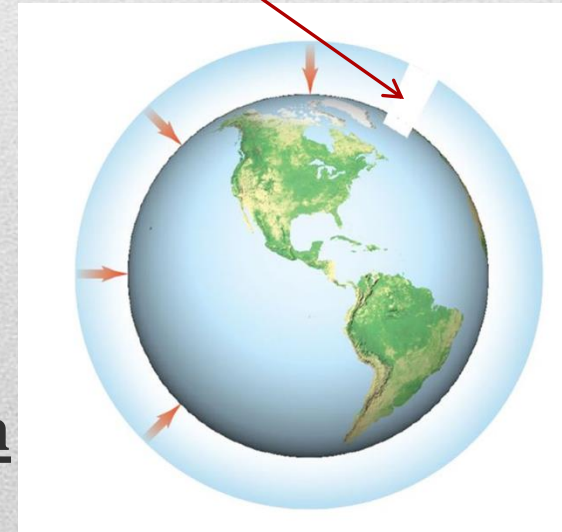


# Atmospheric Pressure

- Atmospheric Pressure is the force exerted by the gas molecules on some area of the Earth's surface or on any body.
  - This pressure is exerted on every solid or liquid surface it touches
  - It is Omni-directional, exerted equally in all directions.
  - Atmospheric pressures are simply the “weight” of a column air above a given point.
  - The taller the column of air the greater the pressure.
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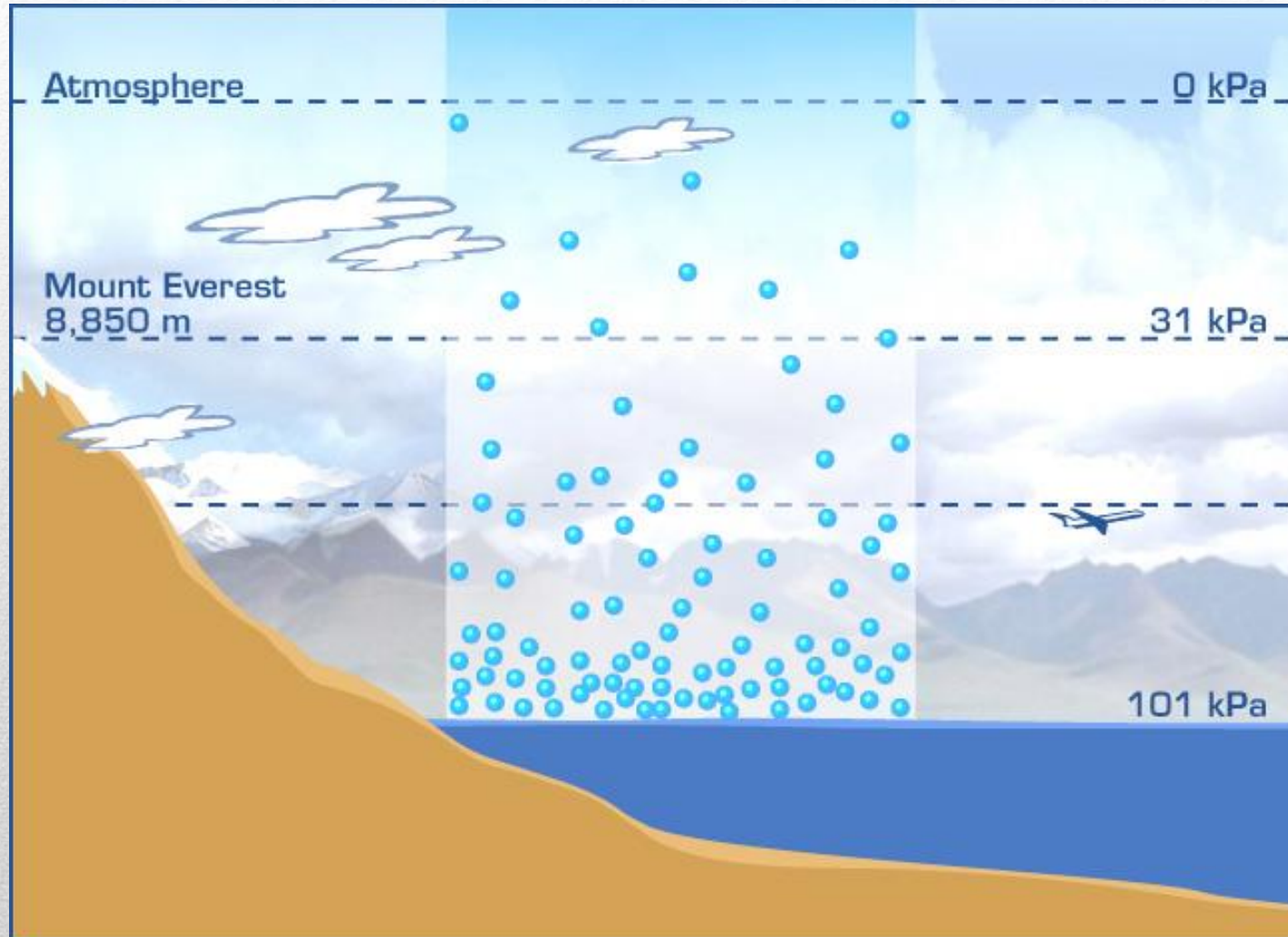
# Atmospheric Pressure

- Air pressure can be on the surface of the earth or on a plane in the air
  - So at *sea level*, the column of air above is longer thus the air pressure is higher, and the air is denser
  - At a *high altitude* there is a smaller column of air, so the air pressure is lower and the air is less dense.
  - Nearly all of the weight of the atmosphere and pressure is in the lower atmosphere below the elevation of 31 miles
- The decrease in air pressure decreases with altitude but not at a constant rate.





# Atmospheric Pressure and Density



# Density of Atmospheric Pressure

- Density and Pressure

- Density is the mass of matter in a unit volume

- ❖ The density of a gas is proportional to the pressure on it and the pressure the gas exerts is proportional its density. The denser the gas, the greater the pressure it exerts.

- Atmosphere is held to the Earth by gravity. So as the air moves away from the Earth, there is less gravity and less density, thus less pressure.

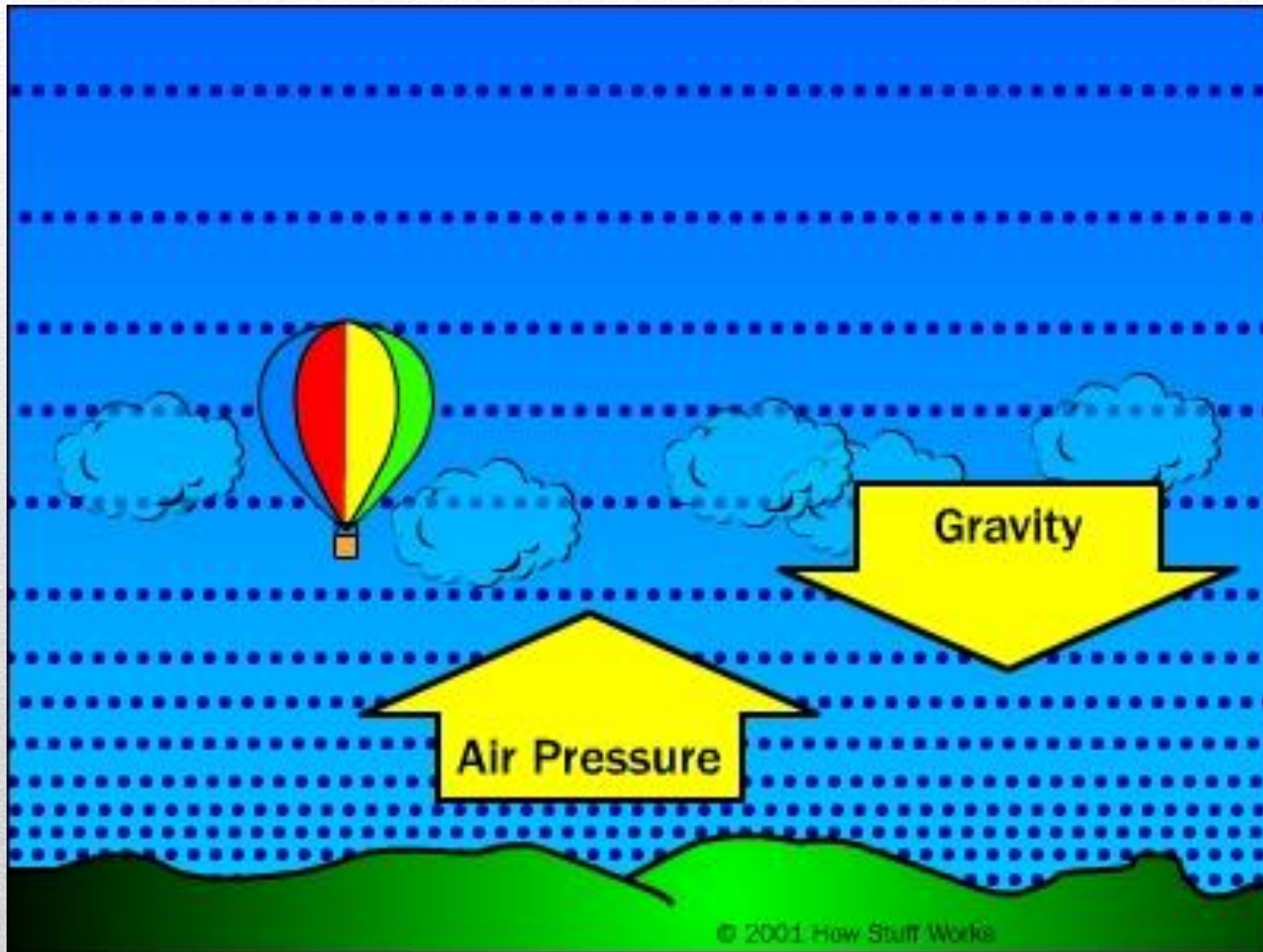
- ❖ Higher altitude, less density, less pressure

- ❖ Lower altitude, higher density, higher pressure

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# Factors Influencing Atmospheric Pressure



# Factors Influencing Atmospheric Pressure

- Changes in *air temperature* and *air movement* are responsible for most of the horizontal variation in atmospheric pressure.
    - Temperature change influences pressure:
      - ❖ *Cold air is denser than warm air and exerts a higher pressure on the underlying surface*
        - *The density of cold air is higher because its gas molecules have lower kinetic energy and stay more closely packed together (They're cold)*
    - When *air pressure and temperature are related, air pressure varies geographically*
    - This has a *strong effect on the weather and global atmospheric circulation patterns*
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# Atmospheric Circulation Patterns

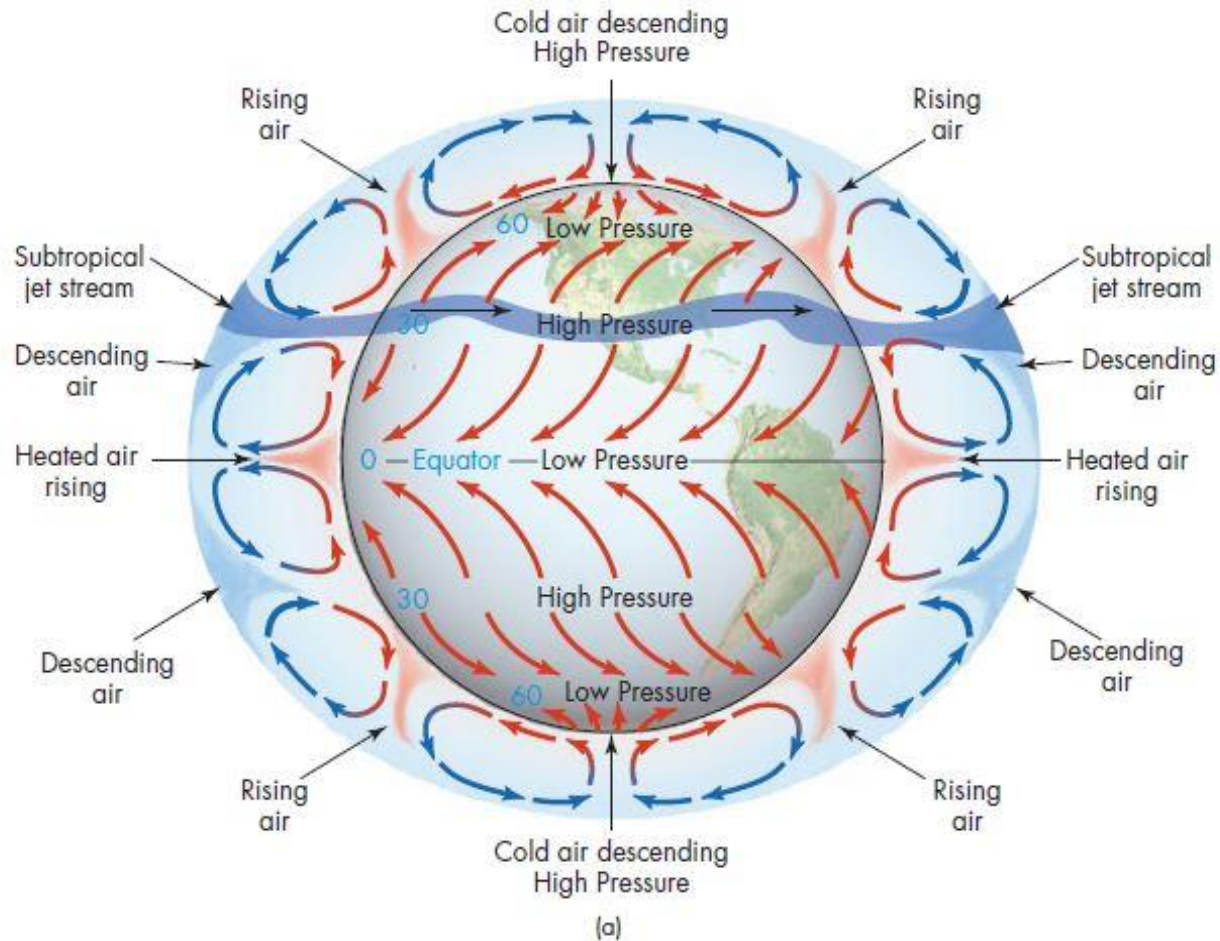
- Solar heating and evaporation of seawater at low latitudes create warm masses with high relative humidity
    - This creates low-pressure zones at equatorial latitudes the convect (move) upward in the atmosphere
    - These zones cool as they rise causing an increase in relative humidity and condensation to form clouds
    - This creates abundant precipitation characteristics in the tropics
  - Having dropped the rain, the dry, cold and dense air spreads out and sinks at 30 degrees north and south
    - Subtropical middle latitude deserts are the results of these descending air masses
    - These include the Sahara, Arabian, and Mojave deserts
-

# Atmospheric Circulation Patterns

- Similar vertical circulation cells are observed at the middle latitudes
    - This creates low-pressure zones at the middle latitudes, 30 to 60 degrees north or south
    - These zones cool as they rise causing an increase in relative humidity and condensation to form clouds.
    - This creates mid-latitude zones of air masses giving seasonal precipitation
  - Above 60 degrees north and south, are the polar circulation cells
    - These circulation cells create descending highs of cold air with relatively low precipitation
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# Atmospheric Circulation Patterns

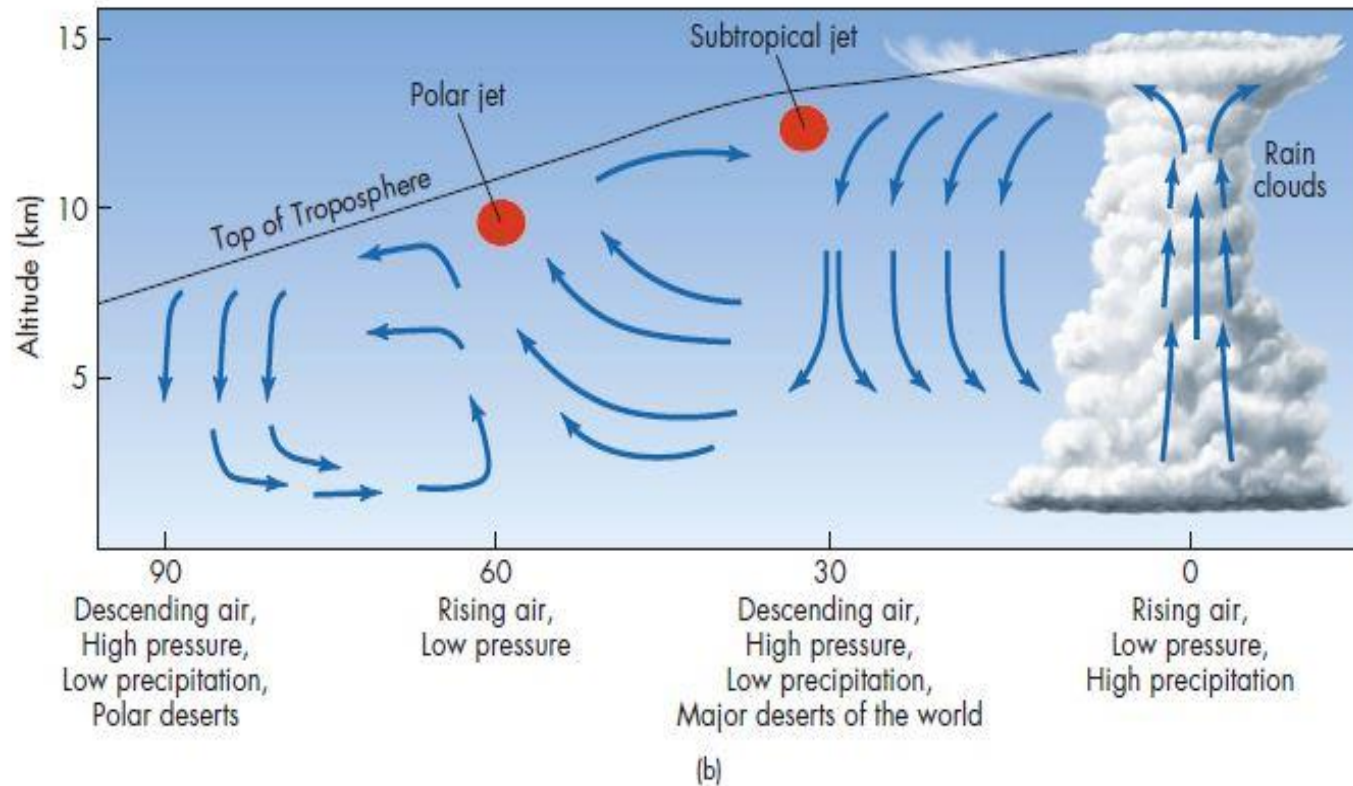


# Atmospheric Circulation Patterns

- Air movement can also cause changes in atmospheric pressure
  - An overall flow of air into or out of a region is described as
    - In the Northern Hemisphere
      - ❖ *Low pressures (L) – Divergent -- counter clockwise*
      - ❖ *High pressures (H) – Convergent -- clockwise*
    - In the Southern Hemisphere
      - ❖ *Low pressures (L) – Divergent -- clockwise*
      - ❖ *High pressures (D) – Convergent -- counter clockwise*
  - Wind Speed – indicates the intensity of the pressure
    - If the *gradient is steep, the wind speed is fast*
    - If the *gradient is gentle the wind speed is slow*
  - *After looking at all these different patterns, it is easy to see that atmospheric pressure is a major driving force for wind and weather*
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# Atmospheric Circulation Patterns



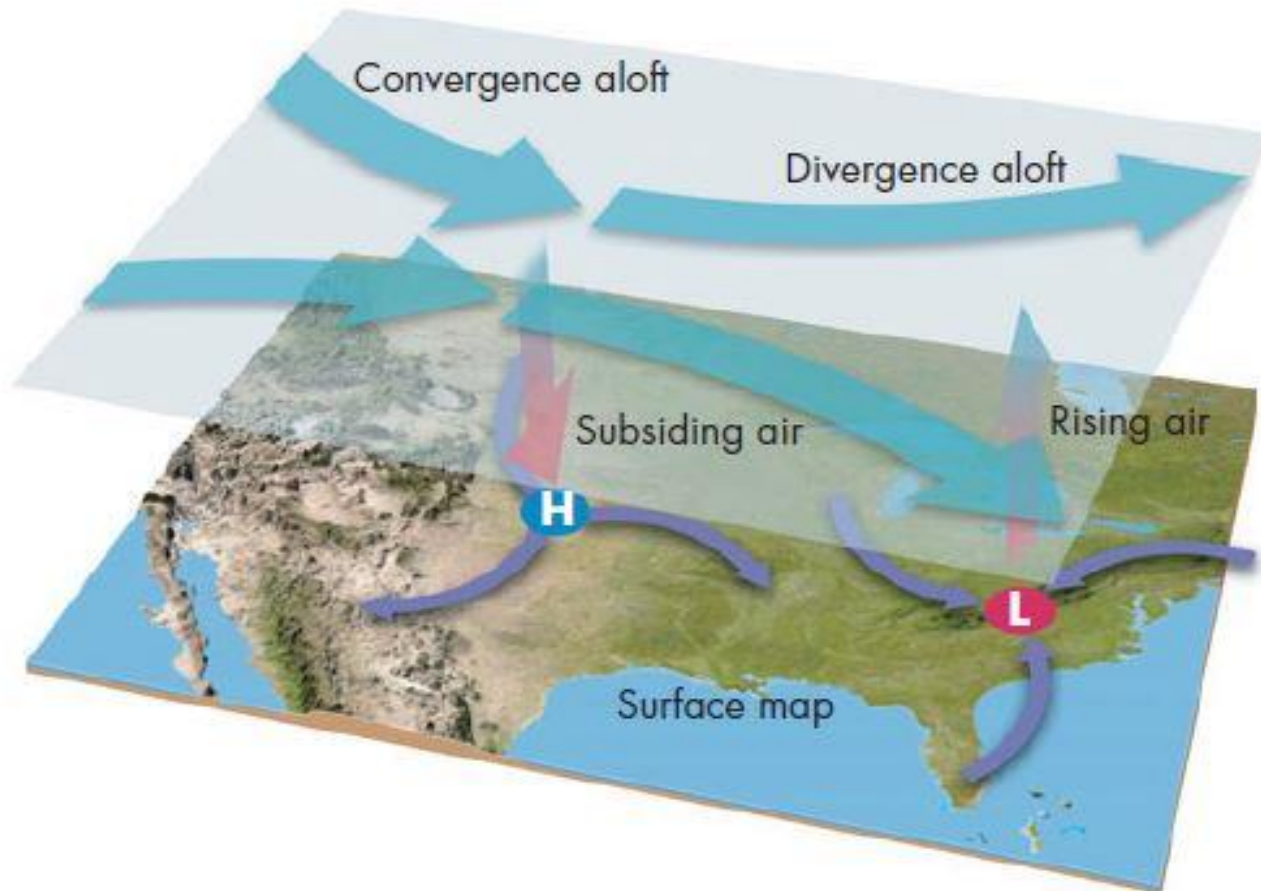
# Buoyancy of Air

- Atmospheric Stability

- Stable air –if a parcel of air resists upward vertical movement
    - ❖ Could become unstable if a force is applied, such a topographical feature (mountain slope)
    - ❖ Stable air is NON-BUOYANT – High Pressure
  - Unstable air– if it either rises without any external force other than the buoyant force or continues to rise after such an external force has ceased to function.
    - ❖ Unstable air is BUOYANT – Low Pressure
    - ❖ Unstable air continues to rise until it reaches temperature and density equal to itself, this is called the equilibrium level.
    - ❖ *Unstable air is associated with severe weather, such as thunderstorms and tornadoes*
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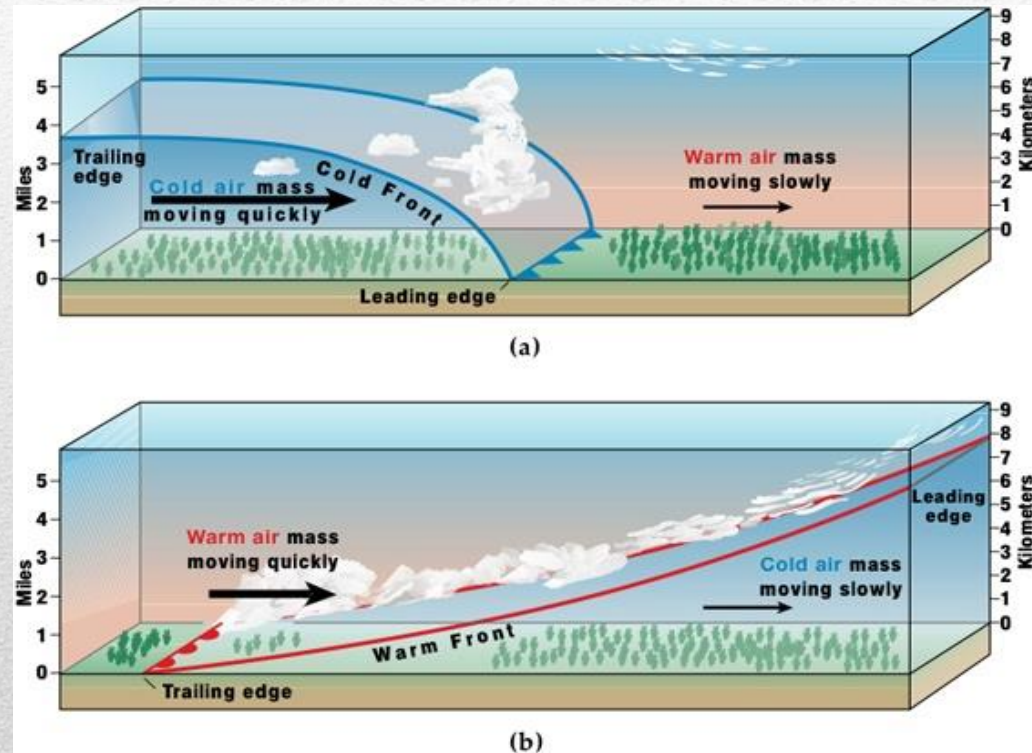


# Buoyancy of Air



# Fronts

- Boundary between a two unlike air masses
  - Not two dimensional boundary at the surface, but a three dimensional zone of discontinuity
  - Regardless of which air mass is advancing on the other, the warmer air will always be lifted by the colder air mass
- Warm, Cold, Stationary, and Occluded fronts



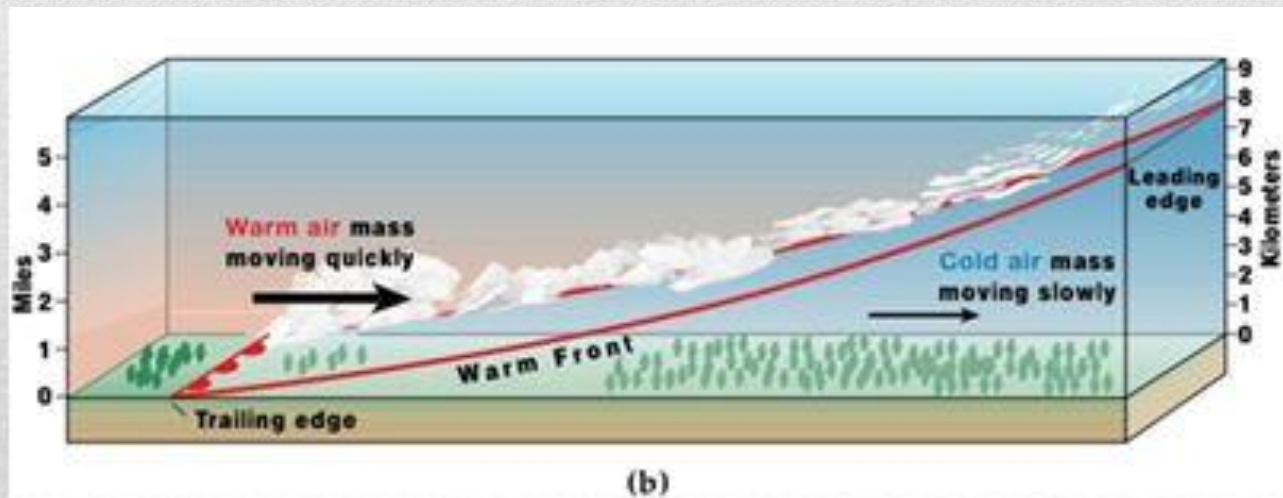


# Fronts

- Regardless of which *air mass is advancing on the other, warmer air will always be lifted by the cold air mass*
  - Because of the different temperature, the air masses will have different:
    - Humidity levels
    - Wind patterns
    - Stability
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# Warm Fronts

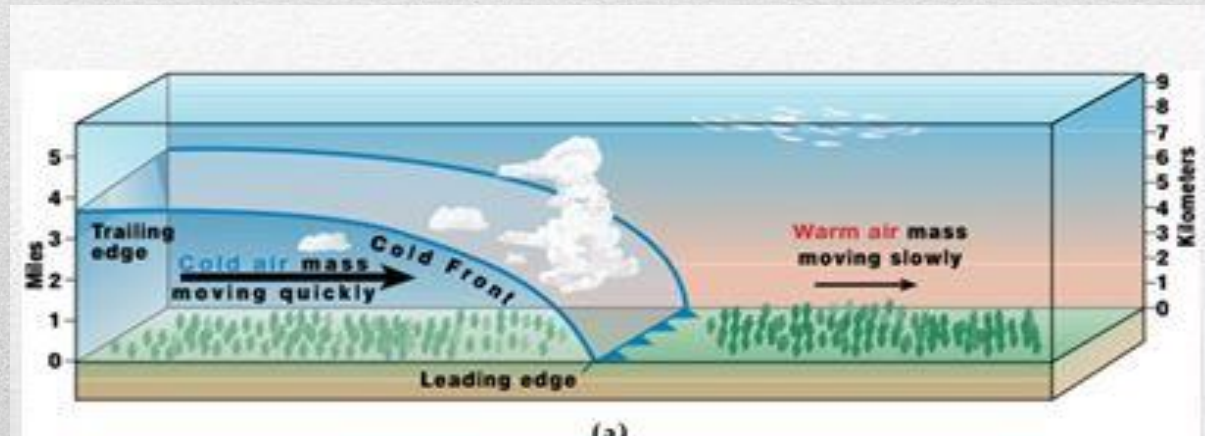
- Formed by *advancing warm air*
- Slope is *gentle*, ascends over *cool air*, decreasing in *temperature as the air rises*
- Clouds *form slowly with not much turbulence* (High cirrus clouds, moving towards a **altocumulus** or **altostratus**)
- *Broad precipitation, protracted and gentle*





# Cold Fronts

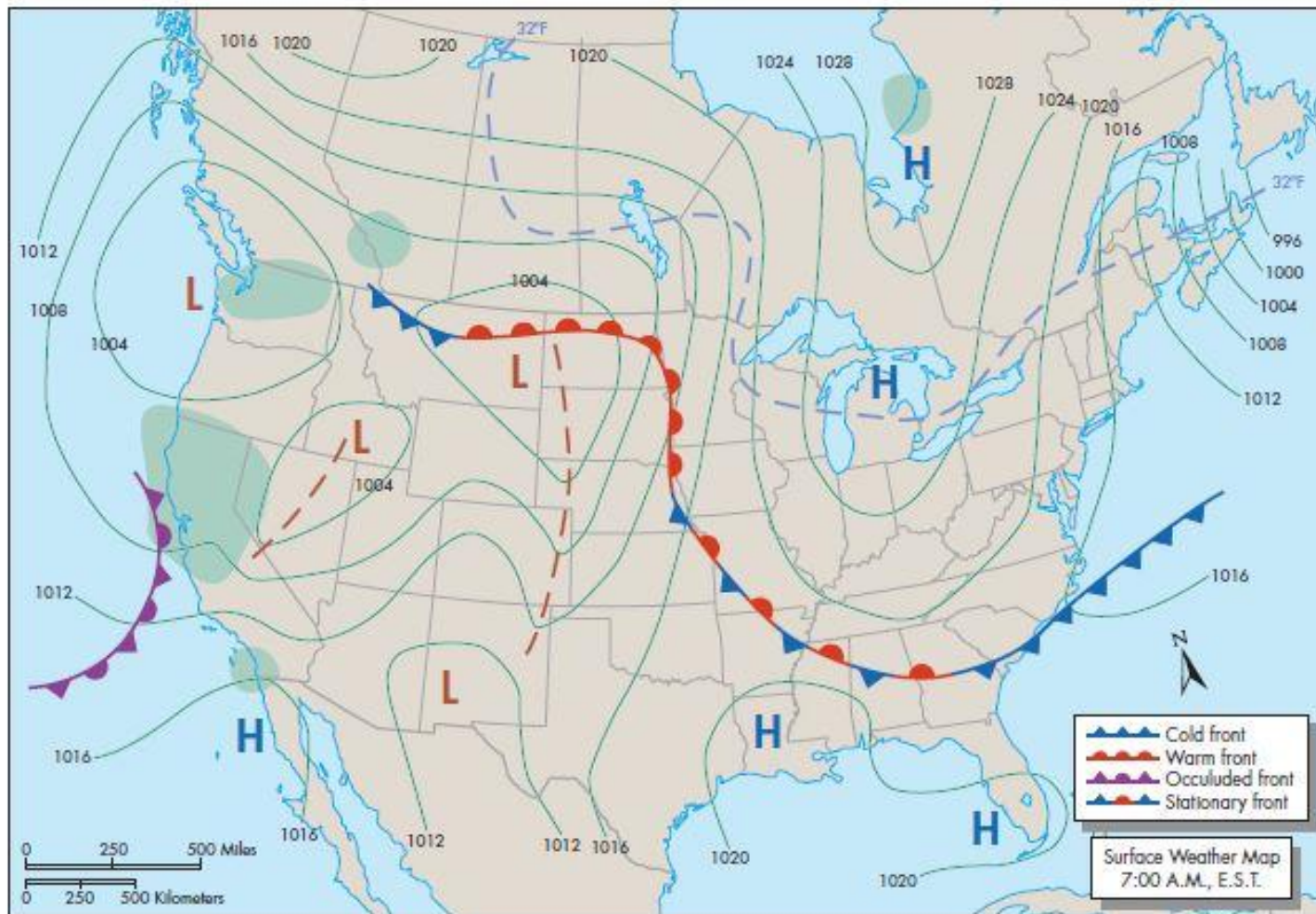
- Forms by *advancing cold air*
- Is a *steeper front than a warm front* with a “*protruding nose*”
- *Moves faster than a warm front*
- *Rapid lifting, unstable air, blustering and violent weather*
- *Vertically developing clouds*
- If *unstable air, precipitation can be showery or violent*
- *Precipitation along the leading edge and immediately behind the ground-level position of the front.*



# Stationary and Occluded Fronts

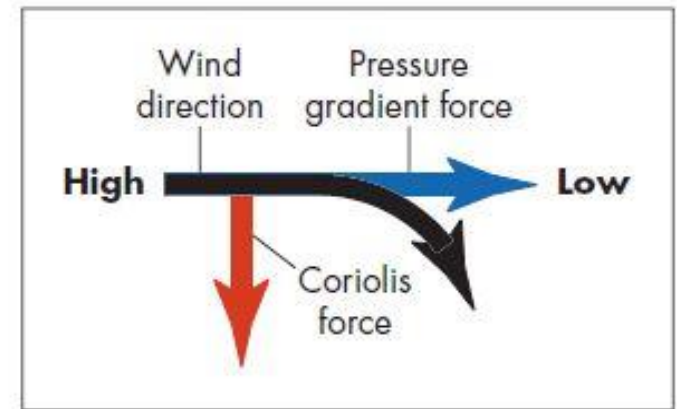
- Stationary Fronts – Boundary *between the warm and cold fronts*
    - May stay *stationary for a few hours to days*
  - Occluded Fronts – when the *rapidly moving cooler air overtakes another cooler air mass and warm air is wedge above the frontal boundary*
  - Each of the four types of Fronts can cause inclement weather
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# The Coriolis Effect or Force

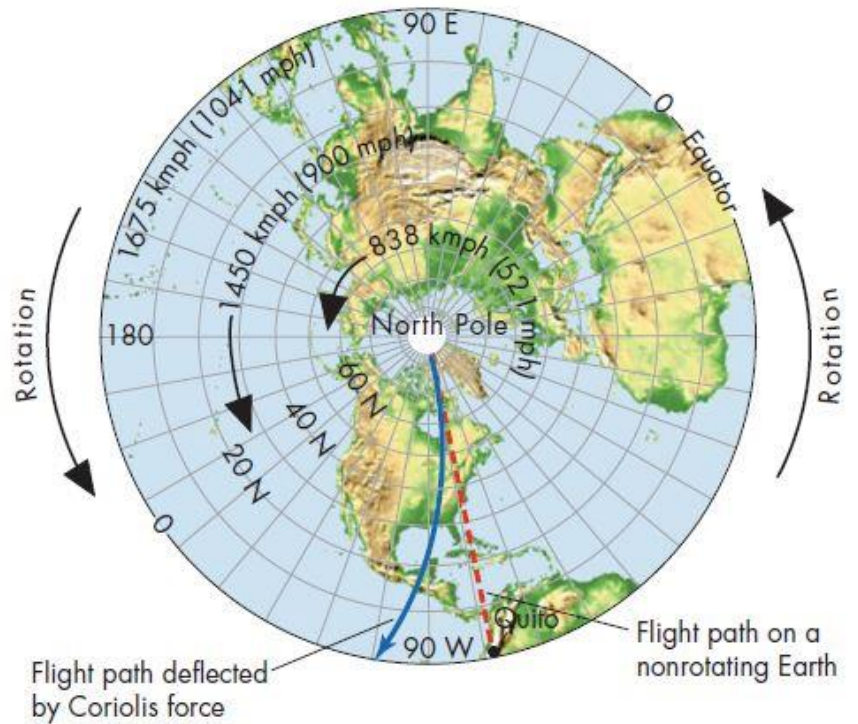
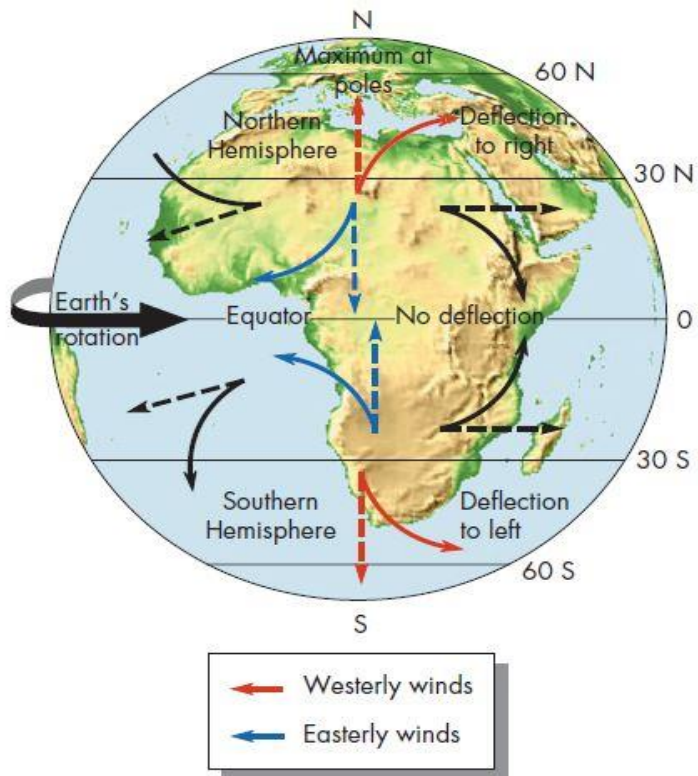
- *Appearance of all things drifting sideways* as a result of the Earth's rotation.
- **Why?** If a rocket is shot directly at New York, by the time the rocket arrives at New York, the *Earth has rotated and the rocket seems to have “drifted”*
- *Applies to any freely moving object.*





# Four Basic Points of the Coriolis Effect

1. *Regardless of the initial direction of motion*, any freely moving object appears to deflect to the right in the **Northern Hemisphere** and to the *left* in the **Southern Hemisphere**
  2. The apparent deflection is strongest at the **poles** and decreases progressively toward the equator where there is zero
  3. The Coriolis effect is proportional to the speed of the object, so a fast-moving object is deflected more than a slow one
  4. The Coriolis effect influences direction of movement only... it has no effect on speed.
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# Hazardous Weather

- The *basic principles of the atmosphere which we have looked at can help us understand associated hazards*
  - *Severe weather* refers to:
    - Thunderstorms
    - Tornadoes
    - Hurricanes
    - Blizzards
    - Ice storms
    - Mountain windstorms
    - Heatwaves
    - Dust storms
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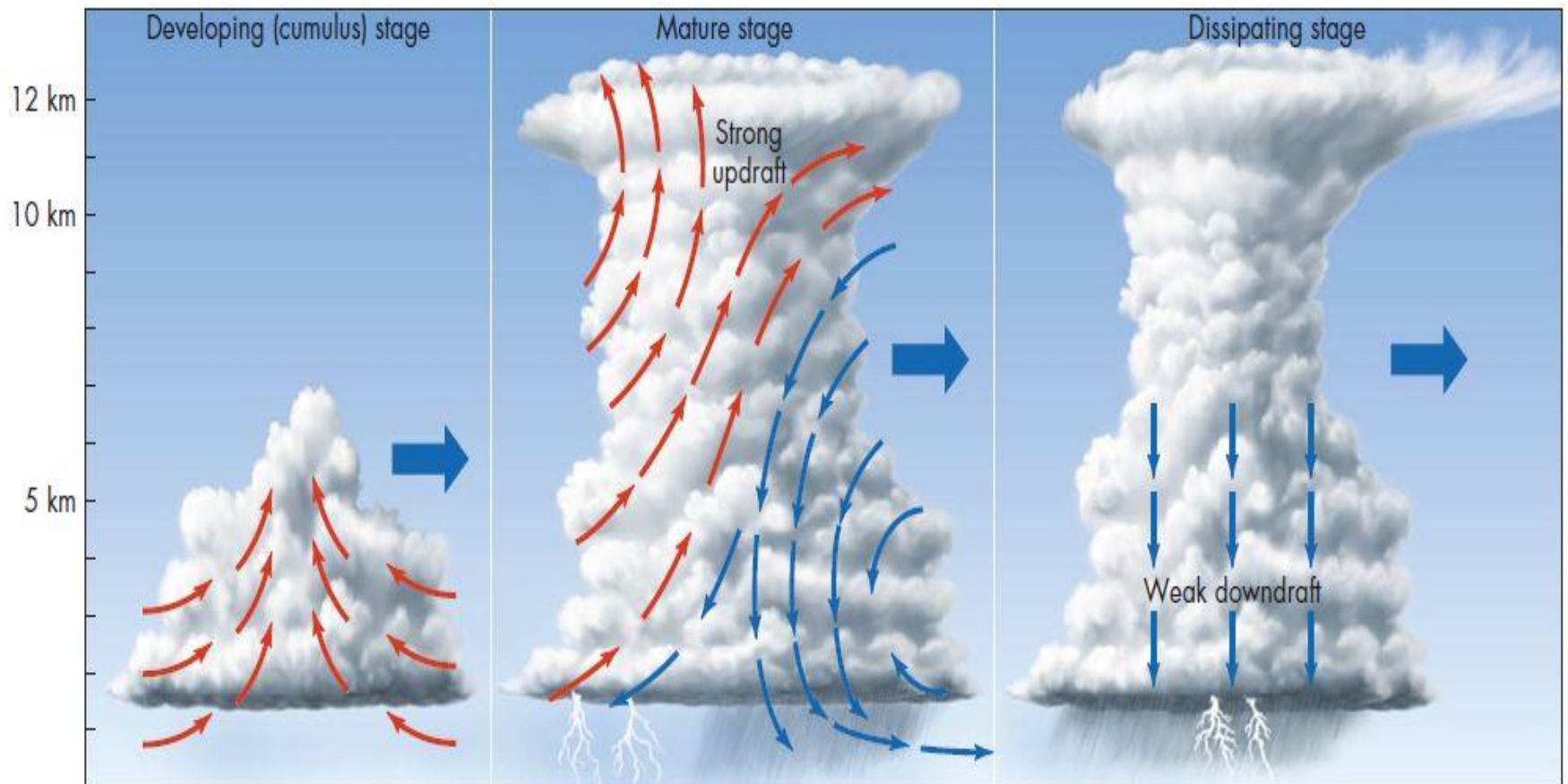
# Thunderstorms

- Thunderstorms:
    - Three basic atmospheric conditions are necessary for a thunderstorm to form:
      - Warm humid air must be available in the low atmosphere
      - A steep vertical temperature gradient must exist in the environment
      - An updraft must force moist air up to colder levels of the atmosphere
-



# Thunderstorms

- Thunderstorms:
    - Defined as a *violent convective storm* accompanied by thunder and lightning
    - *Found frequently found in conjunction with other kinds of storms*
    - *Triggered by unstable uplift*
    - Formation called the *cumulus stage*
    - *Mature stage* – in which updrafts and downdrafts coexist as the cloud continues to enlarge – heavy rain accompanied with hail, blustery winds, lighting, and the growth of the anvil top
    - *Dissipating stage* -- with light rain ending the turbulence.
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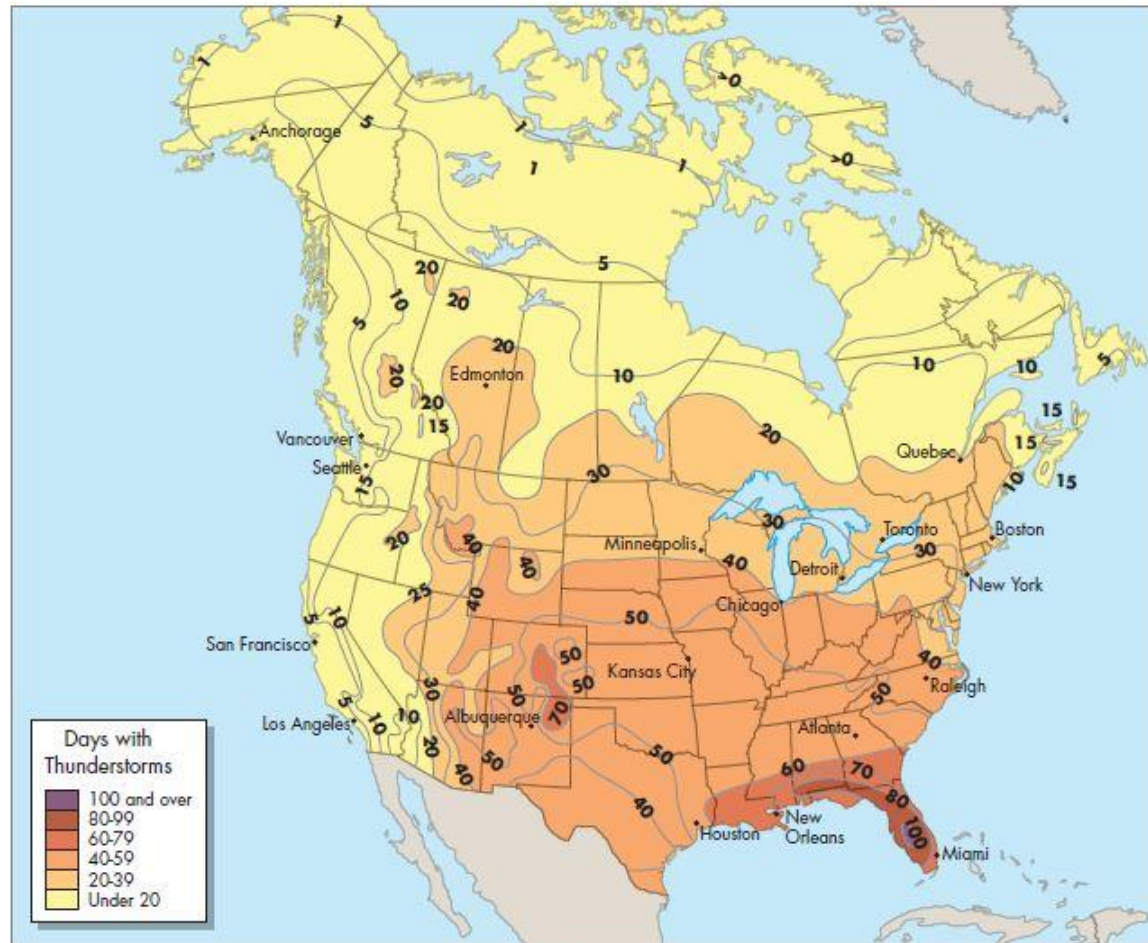




# Localized Severe Thunderstorms

- Severe Thunderstorms can have
    - *Wind exceeds 58 mph*
    - *Hailstones larger than  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch*
    - *Generates a Tornado*
  - Conditions to create a severe thunderstorm are
    - *Changes in wind shear*
    - *High water-vapor content*
    - *Updraft of air*
    - *The existence of a dry air mass above a moist air mass*
    - *Most important is the Vertical wind shear*
    - *The most damaging is the supercell storm*
    - *Hailstones can be a hazard from a thunderstorm*
  - Hailstones-cause more damage than casualties
-

# Thunderstorms Locations





# Hail

- Large thunderstorms can produce hard pieces of ice called *hailstones*
  - *Severe thunderstorms produce large hail which is the most dangerous*
  - Start as a small piece of ice in the center of a thunderstorm
  - *Travel up and down the cloud in the cold, freezing more and more ice around the center*
  - Eventually gets so heavy that it falls to the ground
  - *Hailstorms can cause a great deal of property damage*
-

# Tornadoes

- Very small and localized
  - Most destructive of all atmospheric disturbances
  - Most intense vortex in nature , deep low pressure cell surrounded by a violently whirling cylinder of wind
  - Less than a quarter of a mile in diameter but most extreme pressure gradients known (100-millibar difference from the center to the edge)
  - Upswept water vapor condenses into a funnel cloud
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# Stages in Tornado Development



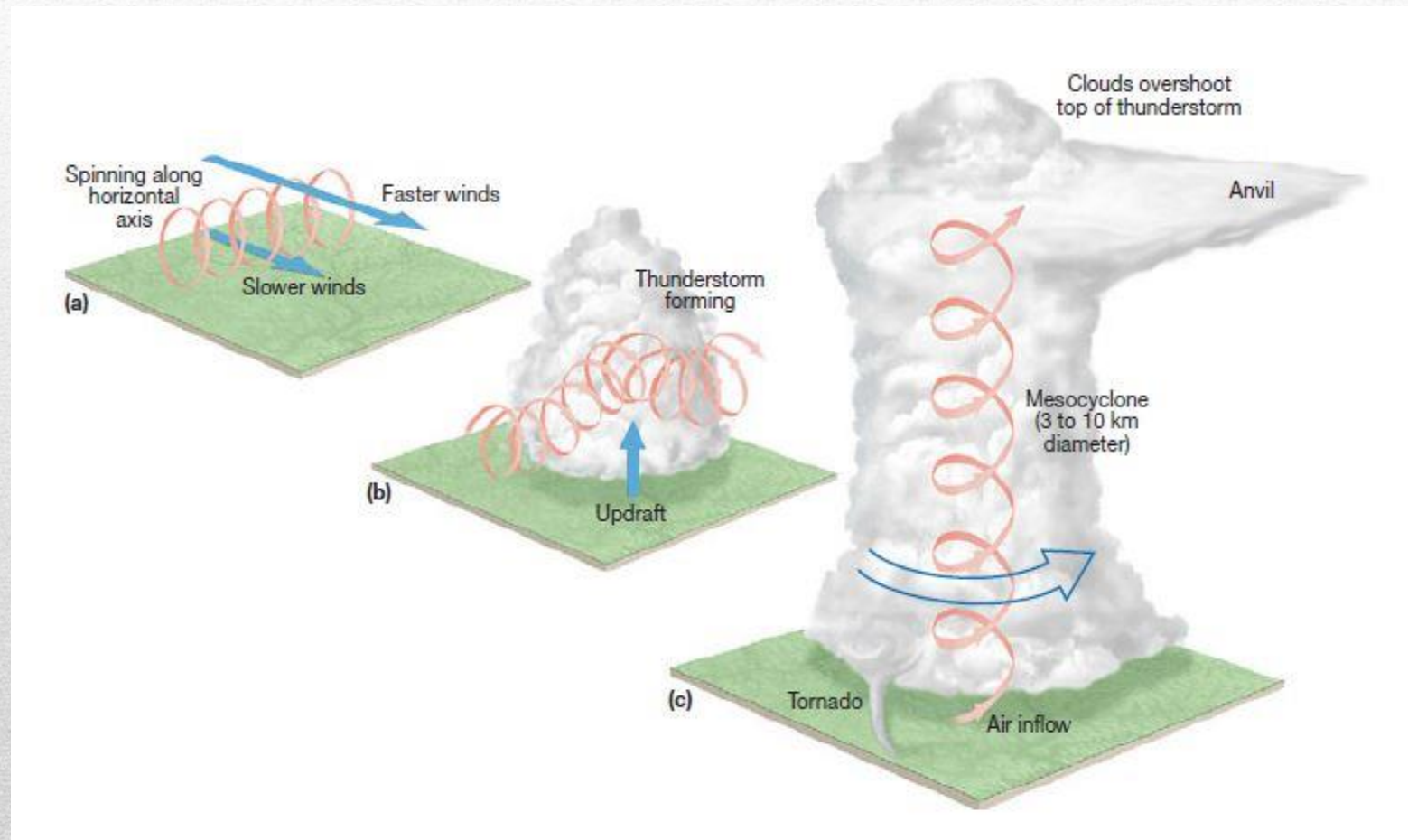
# Tornadoes

- Advances along an irregular track that generally extends from southwest to northeast in the US
- Fujita tornado intensity scale (F-scale) for intensity
- Formation – develop in the warm moist unstable air associated with a mid latitude cyclone, along the squall line
- Develops out of mesocyclone, but only about half of all mesocyclones formed result in a tornado
- More than 90 % of tornadoes happen in the US in Tornado Alley

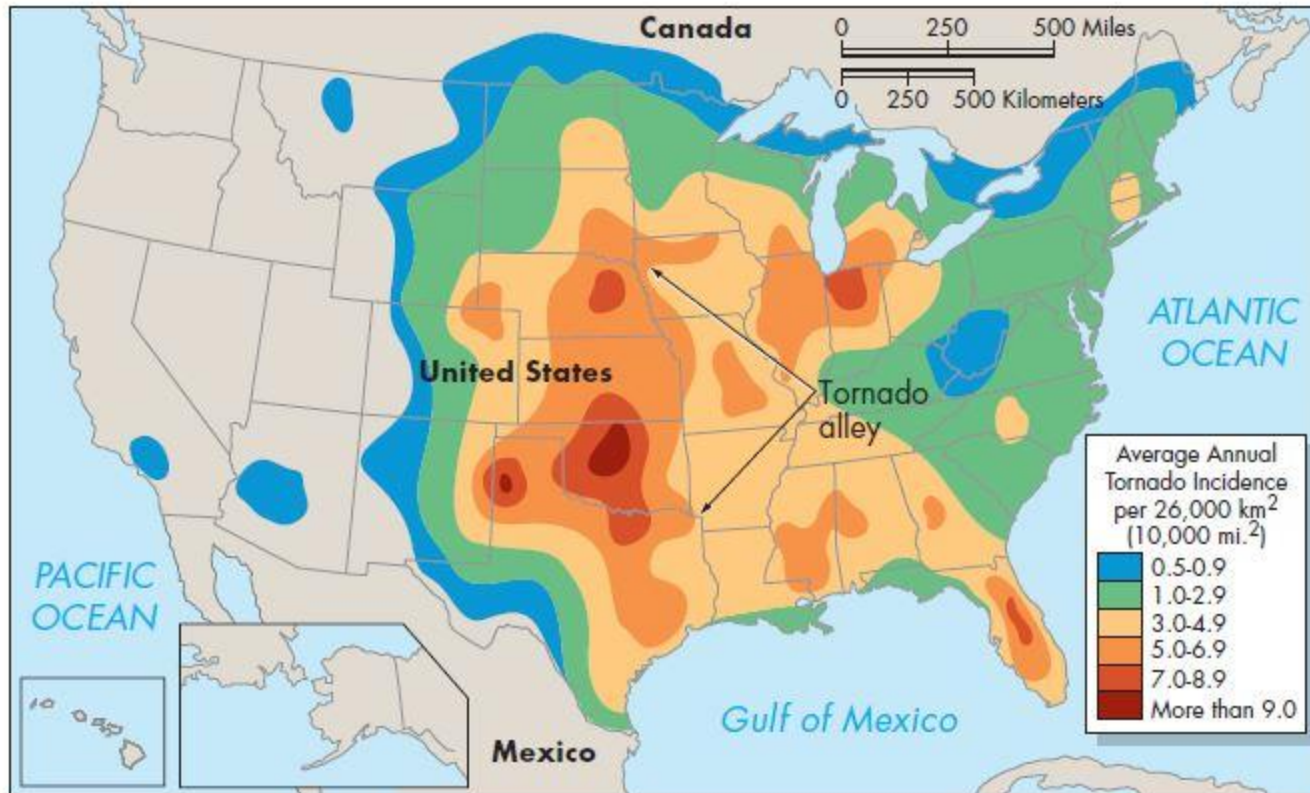




# Tornado Formation



# Tornado Alley





# Blizzards and Ice Storms

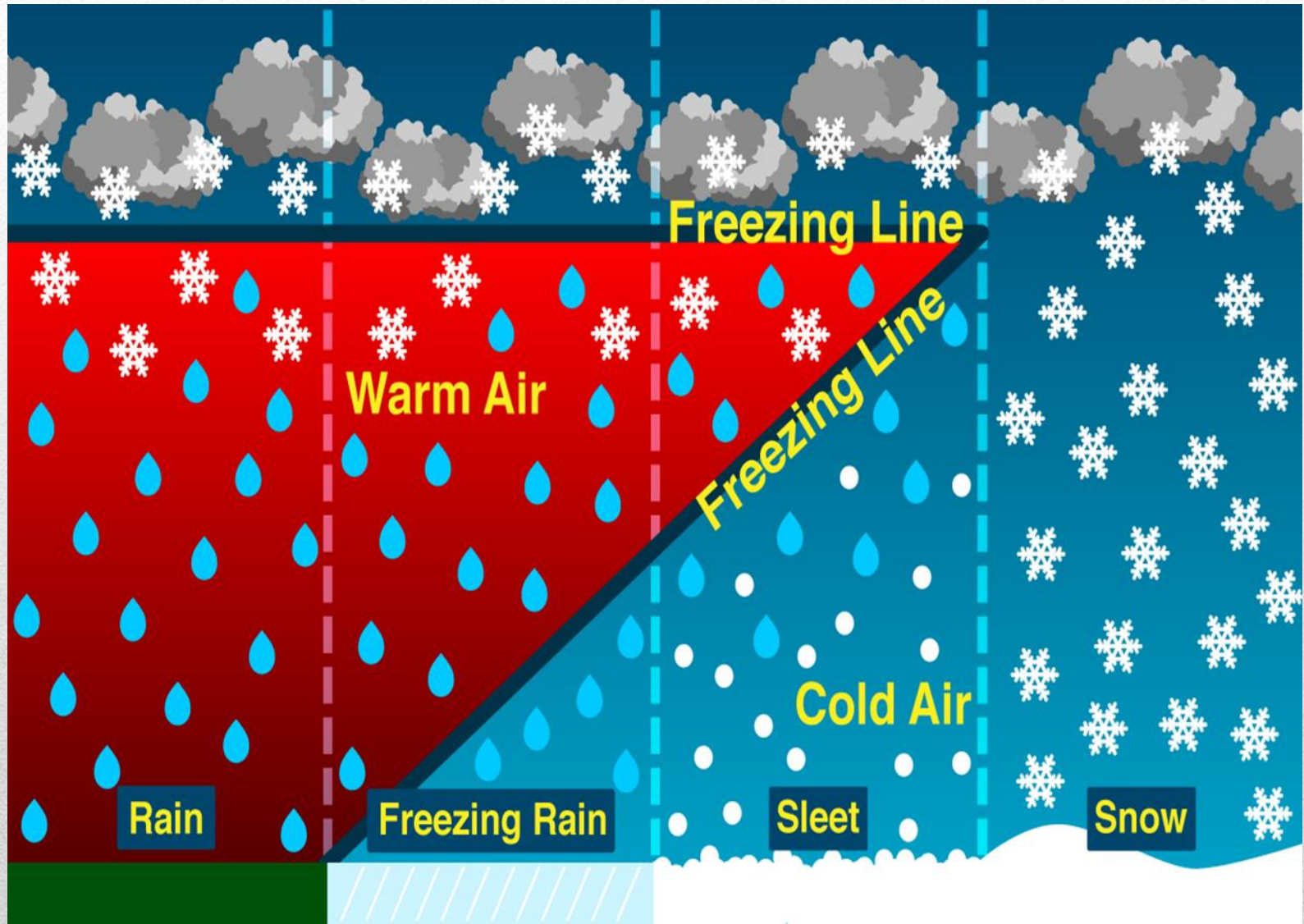
- Blizzards- *Severe winter storms*
    - Large amounts of falling snow
    - High Winds
    - Long lasting
    - Low visibilities
    - Extended periods of time
    - Often whiteouts because of the snow
    - Cold temperatures
    - Found across the country, *extremely hazardous in the midland of the US*
    - In the east, they can be called *nor'easters*
    - *Extremely dangerous because of the wind chill*
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# Blizzards and Ice Storms

- Ice Storms

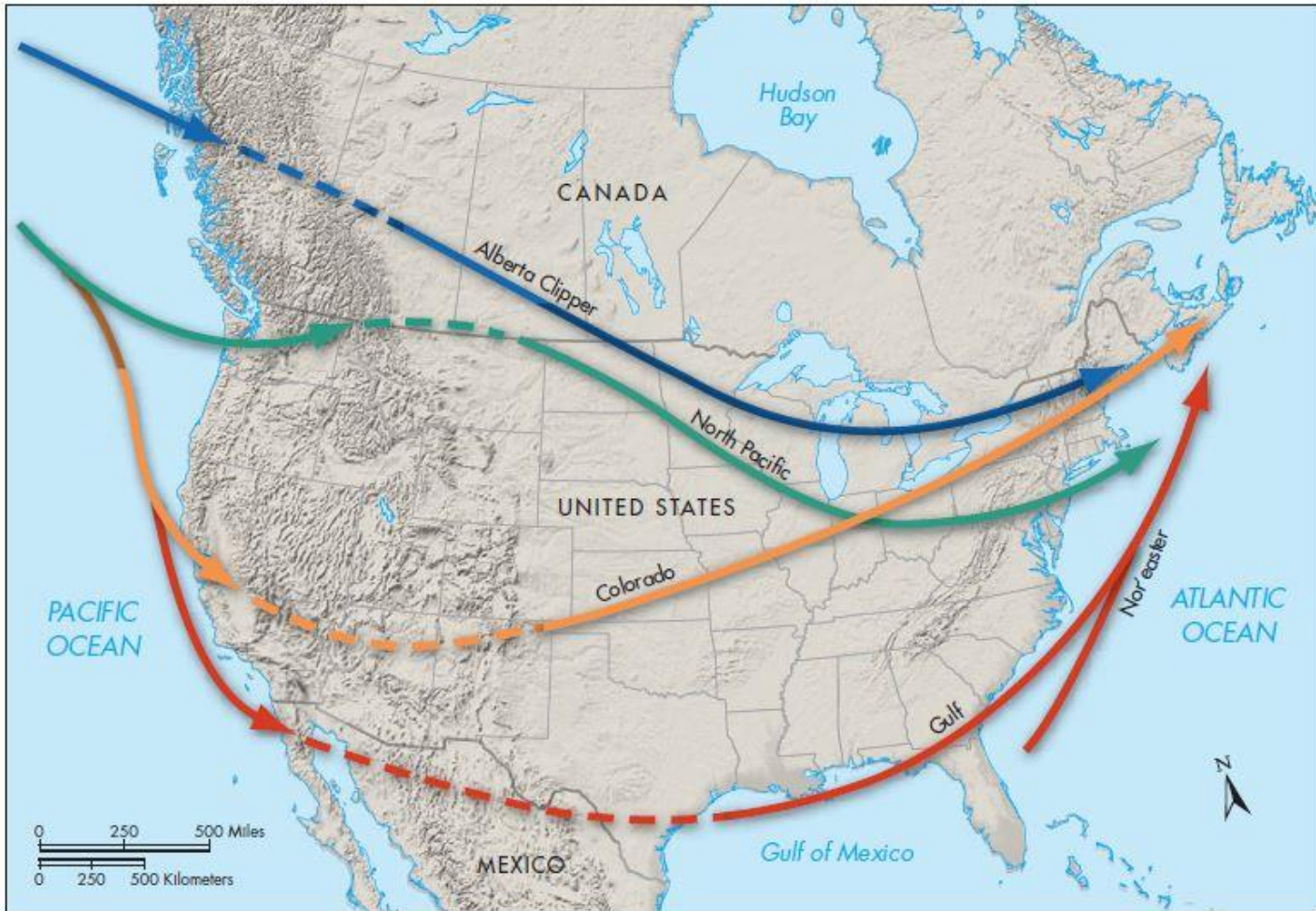
- Prolonged periods of *freezing rain*
  - Develop mostly in the *north side of a stationary or warm front*
  - Three conditions that cause Ice Storms to happen
    - ❖ *Ample source of moisture in a warm front*
    - ❖ *Warm air uplifted over shallow layer of cold air*
    - ❖ *Objects on the land surface close to freezing*
  - *Everything covered with ice*
  - Often found in the *mid-west or east*
-







# Winter Storm Tracks





# Fog

- A Cloud on the ground – becomes hazardous when it *obscures visibility or if pollutants are added to form smog*
  - There are *four kinds of fog* that can develop. These are:
    - Radiation fog – results when the ground loses heat through radiation usually at night.
    - Advection fog – develops when warm, moist air moves horizontally over a cold surface, such as snow-covered ground or cold ocean current
    - Upslope fog or orographic fog -- by adiabatic cooling when humid air climbs a topographic slope
    - Evaporation fog – results when water vapor is added to cold air that is already near saturation.
  - The *foggiest areas in the US are the Pacific, New England and the Atlantic Canada coasts, and the valleys and hills of the Appalachians*
  - Dense fog contributes to numerous accident, injuries, and deaths each year
-

# Drought & Mountain Windstorms

- Hazards created by wind and lack of rain

- Drought

- ❖ *Extended period of unusually low precipitation* that produces a temporary shortage of water for people, other animals, and plants
- ❖ More than *1 billion people around the world live in arid areas*
  - Contribute to food shortages-causes famine
  - Water shortages
  - Power shortages
  - Decrease in industrial productivity

- Mountain Windstorms

- ❖ *Strong winds, usually in the winter, which blow down the downward sides of mountains*
    - Much like our “*east winds*” when we have a high pressure to the northeast of Utah
-



# Dust and Sand Storms, Heat Waves

- *Hazards created by wind and lack of rain*

- *Dust and Sand Storms*

- ❖ Strong windstorms carrying suspended dust causing low visibility for a long period of time

- *Heat Waves*

- ❖ Prolonged periods of extreme heat
    - Both longer and hotter than the year before
    - Happen under prolong high pressures
    - Responsible for many deaths from 1992 on
-

# Dust Storms of the 1930s



(a)

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# Human Interaction with Weather

- Many natural hazards are *clearly and significantly altered by human activities*
    - We have seen:
      - ❖ *How land use affect flooding and landslides*
      - ❖ *How deep-well disposal and the filling of large water reservoirs may contribute to earthquakes*
      - ❖ *How bad farming practices of leaving exposed topsoil lead to the dust bowl situations like in the 1930*
      - ❖ *Locating mobile homes in areas subject to frequent high winds and tornadoes increases damages and loss of life*
      - ❖ *Land-use practices in cities can intensify the effects of heatwaves*
      - ❖ *On a larger scale, human interaction with severe weather is taking place through global warming*
-

# Linkages with Other Hazards

- *Severe weather is linked to other hazards*
    - Flooding , often flash floods
    - Lightening
    - Mass land movements
    - Wildfires
    - Long-term global climate change
-



# Natural Service Functions of Severe Weather

- There are some *natural service functions of severe weather*
    - There are long term services
      - ❖ *Lightening from a thunderstorm can start a wildfire, which can revitalize a forest or prairie*
      - ❖ *Windstorms can help maintain the health of forests*
      - ❖ *Ice storms are a natural ecological cycle that increases plant and animal diversity in the forest*
    - In the *hydrological cycle*, severe weather are a primary source of water
    - Humans can benefit from severe weather by *enjoying a lightening show, watching a snowstorm, and watch a tornado chaser in a movie describe how they can be dumb being in the middle of a tornado*
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# Minimizing Severe Weather Hazards

- *Severe weather will continue to threaten humans, because we can't “fix stupid”*
  - *But if we as humans work at it, we can minimize the damage and loss of life associated with them*
  - *We must be able to predict these events accurately in order to reduce their hazard*
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# Forecasting and Predicting Weather Hazards

- Timely and accurate prediction of severe weather events is extremely important if human lives are to be spared
  - Even with improvements in satellite sensors and computer modeling, we still have difficulty forecasting severe weather
  - The behavior of these events are unpredictable
  - Many of the new ways to forecast and predict the weather have become more and available:
    - The use of the Doppler Radar stations are used to predict severe weather
    - Watches and Warnings are posted for severe weather-if followed there can be less damage and loss of life
    - All of these new prediction abilities can predict the severe weather, but humans have to be aware of their surroundings and act accordingly
-

# Adjustment to the Severe Weather Hazard

- *Although we can't control the weather or the climate, there are two ways we can reduce the loss of life and property*
    - These actions include both long-term changes to community infrastructure and plans or procedures to be implemented for severe weather
    - Long-term actions to prevent or minimize death, injuries, and damage is considered *mitigation*
    - Establishing community and individual plans and procedures to deal with impending natural hazard is considered *preparedness*
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# Adjustment to the Severe Weather Hazard

- Mitigation activities

- Using safety-conscious engineering in building structures

- Installing warning systems

- Establishing hazard insurance

- Preparedness and Personal Adjustments

- Establishing community and individual plans and procedures to deal with an impending natural hazard

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